FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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The purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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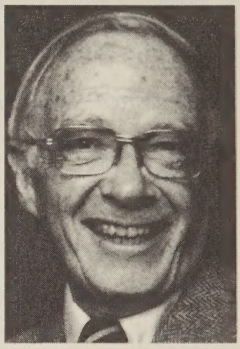
Cover photograph by John M. Morgan: Appalachian Trail, Smoky Mountains National Park.



Joy to the world! Out of the formless Ultimate Reality called God was born the Christ in the form of a human child.

Christ came into our world of relativity—of time, of history—to reveal the sacred mystery. The nature of God—the Formless that is totally empty yet contains all things—is Love.

In the publication *Living Prayer*, the contemplative and philosopher Beatrice Bruteau writes:

> Since all of us are forms of the Formless, the Invisible God, this is the foundation for that unconditional love which is the identifying work of the children of God. (IJN 3.10) Recognizing this deepest of all kinship, one acknowledges all as one's relatives and genuinely experiences that what happens to any one of them happens to ourselves. (MK 3.35; 25.40)

Love, in other words, is the heart of our own true nature. To wake up to that truth—to give of ourselves for the benefit of others—is to become enlightened, to become One with the source; to know ultimate joy and the peace that passeth all understanding.

That's the great news of the Christian Gospel. Everything in the Universe partakes of the unseen source of being whose nature is love. All we have to do is let go of our fear of acting on that knowledge.

You and I, and all our family and friends and neighbors the world over, are inextricably interconnected and bound together by love. We are all beloved children of God—beneficiaries of God's unconditional love and acceptance, and we are called upon to pour out our own loving kindness on everyone and everything in God's creation.

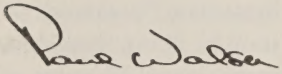
Mother Teresa, who sees everyone she meets as God in one of His or Her many disguises, remembers always that "whatever you do to the least of these my children you do to me." A Tibetan Buddhist practice trains monks and nuns to take on the other person's pain and suffering and transfer to the other their own good fortune and well being.

Our true nature would lead us to do the same were it not that confusion and fear, the ego's fearful need to defend at all costs the transient, illusory pleasures and possessions of our isolated lives, makes us fall out of love.

The child in the manger, bearing witness through its life, death and resurrection to the invisible realm of peace and joy, revealed it as a beginningless and endless outpouring of compassion and self-emptying love.

Thomas Merton told us that "God's greatest gift to us, our most essential and peculiar power, the most intimate secret of our humanity, is our capacity to love. This power in the depths of our souls stamps us in the image and likeness of God—and we are called on to love everyone and everything in this world."

What a wonderful way that would be to celebrate Christmas—to fall in love again! To see everyone with the eyes and heart of loving kindness and compassion. Let's try it! We just might change the world!



Paul Walsh

Two Weeks ago, in the basement of San Francisco's blazing Gothic jewel box, Grace Episcopal Cathedral, a group of young people from England presented their long-awaited "Planetary Mass." Blending the most sacred elements in traditional Christian ritual with high-tech artistry, the mass may have paved the way for our young generation to begin to return to church. With an updated message inspired by Creation Spirituality—the rich western spiritual tradition mined by Episcopal theologian, Matthew Fox—and by using the arts which appeal to the young, this extraordinary worship service took a step toward the revitalization of spirituality in America.

Invited by Fox, 30 of the 300 members of an Anglican community, NOS—for Nine O'clock Service—came from Sheffield to celebrate their "postmodern" mass in the hope that young Americans will soon be doing their own. These "multimedia missionaries," whose average age is 23, some of whom are refugees from the drug culture, came with a huge white altar—shaped like the sun with a great crescent moon at its side—with massive video screens and computers, sound equipment, light-show technology and musical instruments—and most of all with deep love and contagious energy.

Their altar stood at the center of a church-without-pews, surrounded by 350 celebrants who sat on the floor, stood, danced, and sang while the one Anglican priest in the group, Rev. Chris Brain, celebrated mass. A chalice stood under a glass pyramid on the altar. The bread and wine were consecrated and distributed in the traditional Christian way. This was in no way a New Age event.

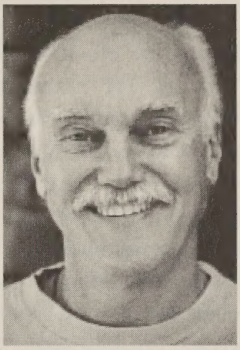
Throughout the mass, fast-shifting images of exploding stars and whirling galaxies, of army tanks and dying rainforests, of people out of control and all-too-in-control, flashed on the giant TV screens, and loud music seemed to echo the pulse of the universe. No one could have left that room without radical new awareness of the social and ecological disasters on our planet and the power of the Spirit to heal and renew. "When a culture loses its spirituality, only the youth can bring it back," said Fox in the sermon: "These young people are here to teach us to pray in a new way."

I hope you will soon have a Planetary Mass in your own area to awaken the Creative Spirit lying dormant in so many of our young.

Mary Ford-Grabowsky

For more information, you may contact the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality, 3500 Mountain Blvd., Oakland CA, 94619.

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAM DASS



Ram Dass was born in 1931 as Richard Alpert. His father was the President of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad and helped found Brandeis University. After receiving his Ph.D from Stanford, Alpert began a promising career as a psychologist at Harvard, but was dismissed from the Harvard faculty in 1963 for conducting research on LSD. A few years later, he travelled to India and undertook a rigorous spiritual practice under the guidance of a great 20th-century sage, Neem Karoli Baba, who gave him the name Ram Dass (or Servant of God). A landmark book he published in 1971, Be Here Now, sold over a million copies.

Upon returning from India, while continuing a disciplined spiritual practice, Ram Dass set out on a path of service which has alleviated human suffering all over the world. Learning that a five-dollar medical procedure could cure a type of blindness in India and Nepal, he raised funds that have restored sight to countless Nepalese men and women. In Guatemala, he has helped to restore agricultural life to large numbers of Maya indians impoverished and displaced by three decades of civil war. Two of his most recent books, How Can I Help? (written with Paul Gorman), and Compassion in Action (with Mirabai Bush), are excellent guides for people awakening to the need to serve.

Ram Dass was invited back to Harvard in 1983 for a much-publicized twentieth anniversary retrospective.

Fellowship in Prayer met with Ram Dass at his small home in San Anselmo, CA, which doubles as a very busy office. Books, files and folders, stacks of papers and manila envelopes were piled high on every available surface. After clearing away a few square yards of space, we sat down to a remarkable conversation. Warm and open and highly intelligent, Ram Dass deserves the respect he has won as one of America's leading spiritual teachers. We regret that space necessitates our printing only a small section of the interview.

FP: Your spiritual awakening took place when you met your spiritual teacher, Neem Karoli Baba, in India many years ago. You've written that in the first hour you knew him, he took you beyond your mind

and into your heart. How could something so huge happen so quickly?

RD: He blew my mind! He confronted my mind with an impossible situation: He knew what had killed my mother the year before in Boston. He knew things that he could not possibly have known through any rational channel which I — as a Harvard professor — could have conceived of. He said to me, "You were under the stars last night." And I had been, about 100 miles away. There was no electricity in the town, the stars seemed so close, and I felt my mother's presence very powerfully. She had died six months before. So I said to him, "I hadn't told anybody that," and I began to get a little uneasy.He closed his eyes and leaned back and said, "Your mother died last year." Then he said, "She got very big in the stomach before she died." She had an enlarged spleen, and they took it out, and she died. And then he leaned forward and said "spleen" in English. When he said that, it just blew my mind. It overloaded my mind—so much that my mind gave up. He was right there looking at me with such love that I felt this violent painful wrenching in my chest. There used to be an old radio program, "The Shadow Knows"; there was a squeaky door, and that's what it felt like, a squeaky door opening. I started to cry. And I must have cried for two days. Everytime I thought of what he had known, I would just burst into tears. I wasn't unhappy, I wasn't happy. It was like I was home. Like I'd come home.

FP: That's an amazing experience on all kinds of levels. For one thing, it shows that the mind is outside the brain and outside space.

RD: Unquestionably. There is no question in my life about that at all anymore.

FP: It seems to me that the essence of that experience was love.

RD: I would say I had never been in the presence of unconditional love before then in my lifetime. In order to be in unconditional love, you must not want anything, even to stay alive. And I had never met anyone who was free. His love wasn't based on my being good or deserving, because he knew everything in my mind already.

He loved me so thoroughly at that moment that I felt safe to be vulnerable, to love him.

FP: You have written about another staggering experience, this time in Hawaii. A very strange, sadistic, cult-like group of people tor-

mented you for 24 hours. They had invited you to lecture and then in a bizarre way literally took you captive and kept attacking you, viciously, accusing you of not being real. It was a radically abusive experience—traumatic—and yet somehow you used it as "grist for the mill." You didn't run away or fight back.

RD: I *did* fight back. I fought back until about midnight, and then I went back to my room and I thought, "They're right."

FP: How could they possibly have been "right"?

RD: Well, they weren't right in the *way* they did it, but they *were* right in what they were saying. That I wasn't authentic, that I was projecting, that I wasn't really being with them. They were hearing the pain of my own being. Back in my room, I thought, "I don't give a damn. If they are doing it out of miserable motives, that's their problem. I can use it. I can use this situation to get free. I want to get free, and this is as good a situation as any." So I walked in the next morning and said, "You are absolutely right. Help me."

RD: But you might have been walking into a destructive situation.

RD: What were they going to destroy? I didn't feel that they would kill me. Other than that, what were they going to do to me? They couldn't harm me psychologically. I don't distrust my own intuitive roots psychologically. I trust that I will take what I need from a situation.

RD: But you ended up on the floor with overwhelming emotion exploding! Your description of what they put you through is a description of trauma.

May the world not be separated by my illusion that I am separate.

RD: I think it was *wonderful*! I felt hate for them for what they did, but it was useful. Incredibly useful! The funny thing was, a year later they wrote that the guy who was the leader of that scene had died mysteriously, and they asked me to come be the leader of that group. I thought, "Isn't that far out!"

FP: How was the experience useful?

RD: It traumatized me into making contact with something from my infancy—very vividly. I was there again, in a moment in my infancy when I lost my power. I was having a temper tantrum, which was the extent of my power expression then. My mother was holding my arms down and just looking at me very coldly. She was my caretaker—I needed her desperately—and it was as though she were saying, "I love you but at the same moment, don't mess with me, kid, cause I'm in control here, and you're going to be my child. You are not you, you are my child."

You can't afford to not use an experience like that if you want to be free. If you want to be free, you can't pander to your own melodrama. It just isn't interesting enough. You only get left with it. You get left with your psychotherapeutic reality, which isn't much fun. You carry your personal baggage and you feel victimized—which is like a fad in our culture. I don't think I'm a victim. I think it's all been incredible grace. That's the fun in life, when you begin to see your suffering as grace. There were situations that should have maimed me psychologically for life, but they were grace.

FP: That interpretation pretty much sums up where most of us are trying to get to in the spiritual life. Most of us would have run or struggled and fought very hard instead of surrendering.

RD: I *know*. I *know*. But being right isn't being free.

FP: Since turning 65, you have been speaking about the topic of "spirituality and aging." What do you mean when you speak of the "wisdom of elders"?

RD: There's a story I should read you. It's so powerful.

FP: Please do.

RD:

> The train clanked and rattled through the suburbs of Tokyo on a drowsy spring afternoon. Our car was comparatively empty, a few housewives with their kids in tow, some old folks going shopping. I gazed absently at the drab houses and dusty hedgerows. At one station the doors opened and suddenly the afternoon quiet was shattered by a man yelling incomprehensible curses. The man staggered into our car. He wore laborer's clothing and he was big and drunk and dirty. Screaming, he swung at a woman holding a baby. His blow sent her spinning into the laps of an elderly couple. It was a miracle that the baby was unharmed. Terrified, the couple jumped up and scrambled

toward the other end of the car. The laborer aimed a kick at the back of the old woman but missed as she scuttled to safety. This so enraged the drunk that he grabbed the metal pole in the center of the car and tried to wrench it out of its stanchion.

I could see that one of his hands was cut and bleeding. The train lurched ahead, its passengers frozen in fear. I stood up," —(The I is Terry Dobson, who was an Aikido master in Japan for many years. He was an American and just died two years ago.)— "I was young then some twenty years ago and in pretty good shape. I had been putting in a solid eight hours of training [in Aikido] nearly every day for the past three years. I thought I was tough. The trouble was my martial skill was untested in actual combat. The students in Aikido were not allowed to fight. Aikido, my instructor said over and over again, is the art of reconciliation. Whoever has the mind to fight has broken his connection with the universe. If you try to dominate people, you are already defeated. We studied how to resolve conflict, not how to start it. I listened to his words and I tried hard. I even crossed the street to avoid the pinball punks who lounged around the train station. My forbearance exalted me. I felt both tough and holy. In my heart however, I wanted an absolutely legitimate opportunity whereby I might save the innocent by destroying the guilty. This is it," I said to myself, getting to my feet. "People are in danger. If I don't do something fast, somebody might get hurt." Seeing me get up, the drunk recognized the chance to focus his rage. "Ah ha, a foreigner, you need a lesson in Japanese manners." I hung on to the luggage rack overhead and gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal. I planned to take this turkey apart, but he had to make the first move. I wanted him mad so I pursed my lips and blew him an insolent kiss. "All right," he hollered. "You're going to get a lesson." He gathered himself for a rush at me.

A fraction of a second before he could move, someone shouted "Hey!" It was earsplitting. I remember the strangely joyous lilting quality to it as if you and a friend had been searching diligently for something and he had suddenly stumbled upon it. "Hey!" I wheeled to my left, the drunk spun to his right. We both stared down at an old Japanese man. He must have been well into his seventies, this tiny gentlemen sitting there, immaculate in his kimono. He took no notice of me, but beamed delightedly at the laborer, as though he had a most important, most welcome secret to share.

"Come here," he said in easy vernacular, beckoning with his hand. "Come here and talk with me." He waved his hand widely. The big man followed his hand as if on a string. He planted his feet belligerently in front of the old man firmly and roared above the clacking wheels, "Why the hell should I talk to you?" The drunk now had his

Tom Dunham

back to me. If his elbow moved so much as a millimeter, I could drop him in his socks. The old man continued to beam at the laborer. "Whatcha been drinkin'," he asked, his eyes sparkling with interest. "I've been drinking sake," the laborer bellowed, "and it's none of your business." Flecks of spittle spattered the old man. "Oh that's wonderful," the old man said, "absolutely wonderful. You see I love sake too. Every night my wife and I—she's seventy-six you know—we take our bottle of sake, we take it out in the garden, we sit on our old bench and watch the sun set, and we look to see how our persimmon tree is doing. My great grandfather planted that tree and he would worry about whether it would recover from those ice storms we had last year. Our tree has done better than expected, especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil. It's gratifying to watch. We take our sake and we go out to enjoy the evening even when it rains."

He looked up at the laborer, his eyes twinkling. As the drunk struggled to follow the old man's conversation, the drunk's face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. "E," he said. "I love persimmons too." His voice trailed off. "Yes," the old man said smiling. "And I'm sure you have a wonderful wife." "Na, my wife died." And with the gentle swaying of the train, the big man began to sob. "I don't got no wife, I don't got no home, I don't got no job, I'm so ashamed of myself." As tears rolled down his cheeks, a spasm of despair shook his body.

There I was standing in my well-scrubbed youthfulness, my "make this world safe for democracy" righteousness. I suddenly felt dirty. Then the train arrived at my stop. As the doors opened, I heard the old man cluck sympathetically. "My, my", he said. "That is a difficult predicament indeed. Sit down here and tell me about it." I turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled on the seat with his head in the old man's lap. The old man was softly stroking the filthy mat of hair. When the train pulled away, I sat down on a bench. What I had wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kindness. I had just seen Aikido tried in combat and the essence of it was love.

RD: Such a deep essence story. We are all living on the subway car. We are all training to be the little old Japanese man in the kimono, who is free enough of his reactivity to act wisely. He's not caught in his desire system. He is the instrument of the harmony — the Aikido.

FP: Clearly there are many special gifts, tasks, challenges, potentiali-

ties available to people in the last decades of life. But how do we ordinary people get there?

RD: I think, first of all, just growing old doesn't do it for you. It's an issue of cultivating the wisdom traditions within yourself. Consciously cultivating wisdom. Just as we brought birth out of the closet, we're bringing death out of the closet and we may be bringing old age out of the closet. It's not a weakness, but a strength, and society really needs at this point to regain its elders. But old people have to demand respect and to be worthy of that respect. They have to have profited from their years by becoming wise.

FP: But for the first time in history the young generation is more educated than the elderly. How can the elders command respect from these young people?

RD: Education isn't the same as wisdom. The kids have knowledge, but not much wisdom.

FP: How *does* one cultivate wisdom in the later decades of life?

RD: The art of aging includes all the chapters that went before. It's the most interesting chapter of life, and we sell it down the river when we treat aging as an error or failure. Aging has its own curriculum. Part of that curriculum is dealing with death, part of that curriculum is dealing with loss, part is dealing with changes in power.

Elders have to form new relationships with the social institutions of which they are a part. You have to get to know who you are inside. And all of that is part of a curriculum which is age-appropriate. Up until now, we have not had a planned curriculum for aging other than, "Keep playing shuffleboard and act as if you are not old."

FP: You have spoken recently about an integration that you would like to see come in elderhood. What would that be like? Is it a question of freedom from conflict?

RD: It is having the spaciousness to embrace the paradoxes that exist across the planes of consciousness. Like: "We are all one, but it's my television set." Those are two things that don't go together. If we are all one, then whose television set is it? What does that mean? The challenge is to learn how to integrate all those planes of consciousness, so that your action comes out of some kind of "whole thing." And you trust where that action comes from. You don't try to weigh it. You

Kuan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion: "She who hears the cries of the world."

don't have to ask, "Am I giving the right amount of credence to this factor or that factor?" You just empty and trust what comes up.

FP: What kind of a spiritual practice can help people to grow toward that kind of integration? Are you engaged in a particular practice which you would want to recommend?

RD: I do lots of different practices. Most recently I've been studying Bhakti yoga. It's a form of practice that arises in a sect of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism. It has usually not been taught until one is done with prerequisites such as hundreds of thousands of prostrations and prayers. But today there's been an opening and it is more widely taught.

It's like sky-gazing. Like looking at the sky with your eyes open, experiencing the sky of awareness as mirroring the sky. You see all of the phenomena of your senses and your thoughts as clouds that pass by. You experience the oceanic quality of awareness, and the phenomena are like waves which come in and out of the ocean. You keep cultivating that-which-sees, not that-which-is-seen, and you rest in that. There is a very deep quality which comes up. Like embracing equanimity. Everything is available in it. You don't stop or change anything.

There is a beautiful line, "May our wisdom mind remain inseparable." Sometimes it's worded dualistically, "May our wisdom minds remain inseparable." But if our minds are inseparable, they aren't "minds," they are just "mind." May the world mind not be separated by my illusion that I am separate.

FP: Thank you.

Out of Somewhere Comes Grace

MARY E. BYRNE

A family of wild ducks arrives in "the jungle of corporate America," turning stormy emotion into reverence.

I've never been the kind of person who has found great solace in taking long walks through the woods, in tune with nature and all its wonders, peacefully counting my blessings to the sounds of bird songs, buzzing insects and rustling leaves. However, it was a spontaneous act of nature I have to thank for yanking me out of an internal tailspin and plunging me into a greater participation in my own life.

It had been the usual kind of day for me at work. My legs throbbed from hanging over the end of a chair for eight hours. My eyes were red and sore from staring at a computer terminal for so long. My mind had shut itself off sometime around mid-morning in a sincere effort to portray the essence of someone truly interested in whether or not the weekly sales quota was going to be met. My soul was full of rage, which I mistook for mere frustration, and I was long past the point where I could ignore the tears that kept welling up in my eyes whenever the phone rang and I had to fake interest in a caller's inquiries. I was hanging on to the tip of a very long rope, and I didn't even know it.

Five o'clock came, and I shot out the doors of corporate hell and ran for my car. An intense summer sun had been pounding down on my vehicle all day, and I wasn't relishing the drive home without air conditioning. I rolled down the windows, cranked up the radio, and headed for the exit. As I turned from the parking lot onto the main road, I was overcome by a sense of coffin-like claustrophobia. All around me were huge glass structures, many stories high, enclosing the very latest in technology, communications, high finance, and inhumanity. I was a nyloned, high-heeled, corporate robot complete with plastic smile and built-in behavior regulators. I was suddenly riding down death row headed for a long stay of execution.

I hit the brakes just in time to avoid a rear-end encounter with the car in front of me. Traffic on both sides of the street during the

Mary Byrne, a freelance writer in Winoma, MN, describes herself as a "recovering refugee of the business world."

busiest point of rush hour had come to a complete halt. I sat in total amazement as I slowly discovered the reason for this unusual delay.

A family of wild ducks had landed in the jungle of corporate America and were lining up like little soldiers preparing to cross the busy road. One by one, they made the initial harrowing leap from curb to concrete. Mom and Dad duck went first. They sprang off the curb and hit the pavement like true veterans, pausing only momentarily to shake their ruffled feathers back to gleaming perfection. Then came the bravest of the tiny ducklings. He took a few contemplated steps backward, ran to the edge of the curb, and threw himself headfirst on to the asphalt. The remaining five ducklings seized the opportunity and jumped off the side of the curb onto their stunned sibling below. Mom and Dad had already made it to the middle of the street and turned around to see what was happening with the rest of their family. All six ducklings were running to catch up with them. They were a flurry of feathered comedy, tripping and stumbling over each other as they made

Robert F. Campbell

their way to Mom and Dad. United once again in the center of the road, I watched them reassemble into a fine alignment as they completed their arduous journey.

As the last of the ducklings set foot on safe ground, I looked up and noticed for the first time that six lanes of traffic had come to a complete stop for nearly five minutes, and not once did a horn blow or an impatient driver shout obscenities from a car window. Furthermore, traffic remained at a reverent standstill for quite some time as we watched the duck family waddle out of sight into a roadside ravine.

When we are trapped inside an environment that buries the human soul, we will either be given enough grace to recognize a miracle when it happens, or we will miss the whole point of the show here on planet earth.

One month after I saw the ducks crossing the road, I quit my job. The phone bill was due today, but I could only send a partial payment. My refrigerator isn't as well stocked as it used to be, and even my cat had to settle for a cheaper brand of cat food. My father is worried sick that I have thrown away my future by turning my back on the business world. I'm certainly aware that I'm living each day with a lot more uncertainty than before. It can be very frightening not knowing exactly where I'm headed these days, but it's even more frightening to wake up and loathe where I am.

When we are trapped inside an environment that buries the human soul, we will either be given enough grace to recognize a miracle when it happens, or we will miss the whole point of the show here on planet earth.

One thing hasn't changed, though, since I made the decision to step off that curb. I won't be turning back. It's straight ahead for the miracles, and an abiding faith that I'll be given the grace to recognize them when they occur.

I'm Not Sure

Lord, I want to love you, yet I'm not sure.
I want to trust you, yet I'm afraid of being taken in.
I know I need you, yet I'm ashamed of the need.
I want to pray, yet I'm afraid of being a hypocrite.
I need my independence, yet I fear to be alone.
I want to belong, yet I must be myself.
Take me, Lord, yet leave me alone.
Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.
O Lord, if you are there, you do understand, don't you?
Give me what I need but leave me free to choose.
Help me work it out my own way, but don't let me go.
Let me understand myself, but don't let me despair.
Come unto me, O Lord—I want you there.
Lighten my darkness—but don't dazzle me.
Help me to see what I need to do and give me strength to do it.
O Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.
Bernard, SSF

Answer Us

O my God, my unworthiness is clear enough to You. The state I'm in is not concealed from You. My request is that I might draw near to you, that I might have Your directive. Guide me then to Yourself by Your own light. Make me to stand in the truth of servanthood within Your hands.

My prayer to You is through the hiddenness of Your gentleness, the gentleness of Your way of dealing, through the very beauty of Your elusiveness, through the greatness of Your might and the utter secret of Your power, by all that is untold in Your transcendence.

I have taken Your Name for my citadel and pleaded to intercession of Your messenger Muhammad—the blessing and peace of God be upon him.

O my God draw me to Yourself, You my Lord, my God. Nurture me, that I may pass away from myself into You. Let me not be ambushed

in myself, hindered and held in the world of sense. Make me pure in word and deed.

O God, You who clothe the hearts of those who understand in the light that is divine where angels cannot lift their heads, so overwhelming is the omnipotent glory, You have said in the decree of Your mighty Book and in Your words from eternity: "Call upon Me and I will hear you and answer." O God, answer us, for what we have remembered and what we have forgotten. Hear our cry of Your grace. Amen, Amen, Amen, You who say to anything: 'Be' and it is.

Ahmad al-Tijani

May You be Blessed Forever

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for not abandoning me when I abandoned you.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for offering your hand of love in my darkest, most lonely moment.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for putting up with such a stubborn soul as mine.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for loving me more than I love myself.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for continuing to pour out your blessings upon me, even though I respond so poorly.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for drawing out the goodness in all people, even including me.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for repaying our sin with your love.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for being constant and unchanging, amidst all the changes of the world.

May you be blessed forever, Lord, for your countless blessings on me and on all your creatures.

Teresa of Avila

I Only Knew Him for an Hour

VIRGINIA NEMETZ

Even in the midst of great loss, there is love.

Gerald perches on the edge of pain. We are in Kathleen's kitchen. Kathleen and I chatter in comfort while Gerald tilts his head and listens. His pallor is remarkable. It rings his eyes and mouth in circles of determination as he tries not to disturb us with his illness. Despite his efforts, I am reminded of a painted scene that hangs in my mother's bedroom. Christ at Gethsemane: he perches on the edge of a rock in that garden, his agony apparent in the hunch of his robed shoulders, as his face endures the waiting. He resembles Gerald.

Gerald is a carpenter. Fine wood finishing is his specialty. He touches wood, then smooths and caresses it into curls and petals. I envision a tree of life that takes its shape beneath his fingers. This tree is laden with blossom and fruit. Its boughs droop with fullness: red apples, seedy pomegranates, rich bread fruit, papaya, and the juicy smell of sweetness. I reach out to grab nourishment, and my fingertips meet wood-grain finish. I run my hand along a limb and am jolted to the earth. This wood is still alive.

Reverence, his true specialty; he releases it through wood, through devotion to life: like Buddha who mediates beneath the Bodhi tree, like Joseph who teaches his Son to work with wood, like Jesus who allows himself to be nailed to a wooden beam. He creates ornate wainscoting and secure mantels, eye-opening window frames, and firm balustrades—to hold the weight of those who need strength.

A few more minutes pass before Gerald excuses himself from the table. Kathleen fusses over him, then leads him to her bedroom where she removes his slippers, and massages his feet, and covers him with her favorite bright quilt. When she returns to the kitchen, her laughter is more subdued and we finish our tea.

I am acquainted with Gerald's work from my conversations with Kathleen. I often stop at her place for a cup of tea and her special brand of loving care. Gerald is her youngest brother, twelve years younger,

A film director and writer in several fields, Virginia Nemetz is preparing at the C. G. Jung Institute—Zurich to be a Jungian analyst.

once raised by her. Some of his gentle persona must have grown out of her mothering, for love beats on bright wings in Kathleen's home. It touches my lips as I sip tea; it surrounds her head in a pink halo of curlers. "Oh, and for sure you're the only one I'd allow to see me in this state," she says, and I glow, feel privileged.

There I stand at her doorstep early in the morning after I drive my daughter to school. She greets me in her bathrobe, no make-up, like an empress. She serves us Irish breakfast tea in mismatched cups and saucers, her hands elegant and freckled, and I revel in the yellow morning sunlight that chooses this moment to stream through her kitchen curtains.

I wait for the tea to seep, content to let Kathleen butter the toast, to locate the jam, to feed me. I am reminded of the time I sent my family away and checked into a local out-patient department for operations on my feet. I tell no one. Hours later, armed with crutches and discharge papers, I asked one of the nurses to phone me a taxi. At my address the taxi driver parks as close to my front steps as possible. He pauses for a moment, expecting someone to come out for me. "Want me to ring the bell?" he asks.

"No, thank you."

He opens the taxi door to help me out. "Lady, will you be okay?"

I hobble to the front door with his assistance and watch as he fumbles with the key and hangs back, not wanting to leave me alone, wondering where everyone is and who will care for me. After I wave him down the drive I collapse in pain at the foot of the stairs. How, I wonder, will I cope? No one told me the operation would be painful. I crawl on hands and knees to my bedroom on the second floor, roll onto the bed. Odd thoughts skid through my head as the pain killers wear off. The kitchen and bathroom seem so far away.

Who asks why bad things happen to good people? The question is irrelevant, irreverant even. It is a question that does not acknowldege good people and the love that they bring.

Some time later I awake to the jangle of the phone beside my bed. It is Kathleen. What am I doing? Would I like to come by for a cup of tea? I hesitate. I am embarrassed at my aloneness, and pain, and unconcern for my own welfare. In half an hour Kathleen arrives. She

serves me tea on a tray in bed. Sweet peas from her garden grace the tray. Her laughter and fussing over my discomfort and reticence. Then, she refuses to leave. She performs this same ritual three days in a row. Each day drifts by on tea and talk and each evening, when she leaves, she tucks me in with a book by my side, a last pot of hot beneath a cozy—within reach.

On the last day she turns to me. "I want to know why you didn't tell me about these operations. Why tell your family it was nothing? Why is it you can't inconvenience anyone? How can we help each other, if we can't accept help?" She kisses me on the cheek.

I cry when she leaves.

Kathleen tells me stories about Gerald in those three days. He has just been diagnosed as having cancer. "He is a walking miracle," she says. "He takes his treatments in the morning, then sings most of the day as he works. He sings Irish tunes while he sands and planes edges and corners and rubs oils into the patterns of wood." She claims he was born cheerful. She delights in stories of their youth in Ireland. A scone is missing and she chases Gerald around the hearth with a broom. They eat tea cakes and tell jokes in front of the peat fire until the early morning hours disappear. I savor these tales while Gerald is formed and grown in my mind's eye.

When I actually meet Gerald in Kathleen's kitchen, I realize that five years of cancer have surely diminished his stature, but I am aware of his dignity and quiet strength as he sits silently at the table. He is Kathleen's beloved brother.

Last month he passed away. I get a phone call one morning from Declin, Kathleen's husband. "She left late last night on a flight back east." Gerald's cancer has metastasized to his brain. He has had a seizure, fallen down stairs in his home, and been rushed to the hospital. Kathleen is gone and won't be back for some time.

If he is unconscious, what good can she possibly do, I ask myself? It is the wrong question. I know this now.

Last semester one of my students claimed that three of his close relatives had died. Each time he notifies me of these events, they happen to coincide with an essay due date. The third time he makes his announcement, I tell him I am truly sympathetic to real sorrow, but integrity is dying all around us. I tell him he must do what he thinks is right. He chooses to drop the course, take a fail grade. Life's pain is a source of growth. There are moments when I wish I was with Kath-

leen. I know she will return purified, whole, expanded from her sorrowful experience, grown in compassion. Within the human spirit lies greatness.

I phone Declin before work two days later. "Any news?"

"He's still alive. Kathleen went directly to the hospital from the airport. She hasn't left the hospital in two days. Her brothers from Ireland have arrived, and together nine immediate family members are keeping a twenty-four hour vigil at his bedside."

Another three days pass. I phone Declin. "They are still at his bedside." I develop an intense interest in herbs and buy basil plants, Egyptian burial plants. Each time I pass the window where they grow I pick a leaf and nibble on it. I crave solitude and darkness.

At odd moments of the day the thought of Kathleen's prolonged mourning exhausts me. I badger Declin for another perspective. "They have set up a tea area in Gerald's room," he says. "They drink tea and devour sweet cakes, recount old stories and tell jokes, dance and tell tales wherein Gerald is the main Character. The doctors claim that Gerald is unconscious. But when family members lean over to ask Gerald if he remembers, he lifts a finger and they know he is listening. Kathleen says it is like an Irish wake except that Gerald is still alive. They

want him to participate, to know how much he is loved and appreciated." I have never known or heard of such love. Throughout the next few days I find myself daydreaming, imagining the smell of basil in the room.

I phone Declin, again. Gerald is in a coma. They expect him to die any second, but the doctors don't understand what is keeping him alive today or, for that matter, what has kept him alive for the last five years. The family asks that all life saving devices be removed. They are concerned that the medical system is beginning to torture him. No one but family is allowed to visit. Their laughter becomes hysterical, their tears fall frequently. I water the basil plants and sit watching, as droplets form on petals and drip slowly into the soil. The plants look so shiny and healthy, their green tips expanding toward the light.

Three days later, Declin phones. "Gerald is dead." Kathleen and her brothers have stayed to help Gerald's wife through the funeral preparations and days of sorrow to follow. They don't want her to suffer alone.

I send flowers to Gerald's home. Others have sent so many flowers they fill the church and are given to hospitals and nursing homes. Gerald's wife doesn't know who they are from; she has only a distant memory of me in Kathleen's kitchen, but I know that the bouquet is an acknowledgement of Kathleen's caring, a gift of reverence for her friendship. The family keep the roses at home instead of sending them to the cemetery, and they live inordinately long for roses.

Kathleen lingers at Gerald's home. She cleans the entire attic and sorts through Gerald's belongings with his wife. They scrutinize old photo albums and organize them. She and her brothers paint and repair the house and plant a perennial garden. The intention is thoughtful, and work-saving, and a tribute to Gerald. One day Declin phones to say that Kathleen will be home on Monday evening.

On Tuesday I cannot bring myself to phone her. I cannot imagine what she has been through. I believe that she must feel drained, and cleansed, and pure, having lived through so many magnified moments in time.

Finally, on Wednesday I drive to her place early in the morning. I cannot put off seeing her another minute. When she opens the door, she is pale, and I recognize her pain. We embrace, find our way to the kitchen, and begin the ritual of tea.

In silence we gaze at the teapot with its hand-painted forget-me-nots

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The Way of Prayer answers the questions of many readers who have asked us specific questions about prayer: When, where, and how to pray; what to pray for; what you can expect from prayer; how to form a prayer group.

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* * * * * * *

What would you like to tell us about your spiritual needs, desires, experiences? About *Fellowship in Prayer*? Use the space below!

Janet Kerr

on the glazed porcelain. "Thank you for the flowers," she says. "For a while I could not come home. And then the flowers arrived."

She hangs her head. "You should have seen him. He was like a wizened old man. After the cancer therapy he weighed only sixty pounds and his bones were coming through his skin. My God, how did he live so long? Then, after all those days of waiting, he died when we were all asked to leave the room. While the nurses changed his bed, he took a deep breath, sighed, and left us." She puts her hand to her forehead and tears wash her cheeks.

"He was a great man," I whisper. "I know because you loved him so much."

Together, we weep. Later, I wish I had thought to keen. Irish women used to know how to do that instinctively. African women still do it. Loss is a howling exhalation, a protest that reaches the outer stars and it needs letting out. It is the first time we have wept together and somehow its reality and honesty fill the kitchen and untie the knots in our chests.

"He was such a simple man, but the things I found out he had done for people. No one knew. Flower chains adorned the cathedral where they connected the many pews he constructed and the wooden pedestals he carved. The funeral service was overwhelming. Three priests asked for the privilege of reading a sermon, numerous requests to write a eulogy came forth, hundreds of mourners followed his casket to the cemetery, despite a Toronto bylaw that forbade more than thirty cars to comprise a funeral procession. Hundreds dimmed their lights and squeezed into the line, forcing traffic to a standstill. It is barely comprehensible that goodness is ferreted out so accurately. Veterans followed in droves. For years he had driven them to church on Sunday. Parents followed in tear-faced silence, feeling what their children could not voice. A widower and his four children remembered. They held hands to help each other, the way Gerald helped their mother before her death. The litany of good deeds goes on and on. "You know, we danced in his room and sang all his favorite Irish ballads."

As Kathleen cries, I cry. I hardly know my own brother and sisters. How does this happen? They know nothing about me, either. Kathleen looks up. "The flowers you sent. . .Gerald's wife kept them at the house to comfort me."

I send a heartfelt acknowledgement to Gerald. How can it be that

he touches my life so profoundly? A simple man, I knew him for an hour. A pale and tired man, he listened intently. He has set into motion a chain reaction that is everlasting. His care and hope, his pain and endurance touch me, his sister, and countless others. Who asks why bad things happen to good people? The question is irrelevant, irreverent even. It is a question that does not acknowledge good people and the moments of love they bring. It is a form of forgetfulness that remembers the molten wax in a candlestick holder and forgets the hours of bright light from that candle; it is the sight of an empty glass without the memory of a refreshing drink of water; it is the remembrance of a pale hand on a half finished cup of tea without an appreciation of the hours and hours of tea shared and other hands held or steps danced in a sunny kitchen or by a bedside, as laughter rings outward.

This Holiday Season Give the Gift of "Wisdom, Love, Goodness, and Joy."

Those gifts come in each issue of *Fellowship in Prayer,* writes Tod Broderick, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Many of our readers feel the same way. That's why we suggest *Fellowship in Prayer* as a most thoughtful and loving gift to friends, family, and loved ones in celebration of the holy season that will soon be with us.

Just print their names and addresses and send the list, along with your check, ($16 per subscription/$22 outside USA) in the envelope inserted in the middle of this issue. A gift card will be sent announcing your gift of *Fellowship in Prayer,* which will begin with the February issue.

WHAT PRAYERS DO YOU USE MOST OFTEN?

What prayers best express your joy, your gratitude, your pain, your need for help?

Fellowship in Prayer is compiling a Book of Prayers that will be a rich resource for all who pray, and you may be able to help us.

What prayers do you use most often to ask for help for your family? For those most in need?

How do you ask for the faith, strength, and courage to meet the hard challenges that come your way?

We ask you to send us the prayers that hold the most meaning for you. They can be traditional, learned at your mother's knee, or sprung spontaneously from your own heart.

Print the prayers on a piece of paper (give the prayer's author and where you found it, if you can) along with your name, address, and phone number so that we can reach you for more information if we need to. Mail the prayers to us in the envelope inserted in the middle of this issue. We will be very grateful.

Paul Walsh
President

Dom Bede Griffiths (1906–1993): Symbol of the Marriage of East and West

WAYNE TEASDALE

The life and legacy of Dom Bede Griffiths are a sign of hope that our planet's golden era is yet to be born.

Dom Bede Griffiths was born Alan Richard Griffiths on December 17, 1906 in Walton-on-Thames in England. He was the youngest of four in a middle class Anglican family. Father Bede attended Christ's Hospital, a public school (really a preparatory school in American parlance) and Oxford. At Oxford his forty-year friendship with C.S. Lewis began. Lewis was his tutor, and together they made many important discoveries of an intellectual and spiritual nature. Both of them, for instance, had a deep mystical appreciation of the natural world, and were, in some sense, nature-mystics. This was the focus of their religious experience at that stage in their lives.

C.S. Lewis and Dom Bede together studied the Bible as literature, and in time they had had an experience similar to that of St. Augustine, in which the profound values of scripture took root in their hearts, and both returned to Christianity. In 1931, shortly after his graduation from university, Bede became a Catholic and entered the Benedictine Order at Prinknash Abbey in Gloustershire. The first half of his rich life, including his conversion, entrance into monastic life, the subsequent years up until his departure for India, are treated in depth in his inspiring autobiography, *The Golden String*.

> I'm going out to India to seek the other half of my soul.

Dom Bede's interest in the East was awakened by a friend, Toni Susmann, one of Jung's first disciples. She and her husband had a Yoga

Brother Wayne Teasdale is a Catholic sannyasi (monk, renunciate) in the lineage of Bede Griffiths from whom he received initiation on January 5, 1989, taking the name of Swami Paramatmananda, or the Bliss of the Supreme Spirit. Brother Wayne serves on the board of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue and is a trustee of the Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago).

Cliff Moore

center in London, and Bede was encouraged by them to read the Oriental classics of spirituality. He read them all, especially the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Brahma Sutras*, the *Tao Te Ching*, and the *Dharmapada*, among others. A deep desire developed in him to go to India and establish a monastic community there. In 1955, he received permission from his abbot to go off to India, and did so. Along with Father Francis Mahieu, a Belgian Cistercian monk, he founded Kurishumala Ashram in 1958, and remained there in Kottayam, Kerala until 1968. It was in that year that he assumed leadership of Shantivanam Ashram in Tamil Nadu from Abhishiktananda (Fr. Henri Le Saux), one of the founders. He was to remain there until his death. During Fr. Bede's tenure, the ashram has known an unprecedented period of growth, also becoming an important international center attracting visitors from the four corners.

His books, *Christ in India*, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, *Return to the Center*, and *The Cosmic Revelation* have all been attempts to communicate the Hindu mystical tradition to the West, suggesting its value for Christian spirituality and the renewal of western society. *The Marriage of East and West* showed the need to unite analytical reason

with intuition, and interiority with Christian spirituality, while *A New Vision of Reality* pointed to the synthesis of Eastern mysticism, Christian faith and science as the way of the future global civilization and culture. *New Creation in Christ* explores the role of contemplation in our lives today, and his last book, *Universal Wisdom*, is an anthology of the sacred writings of the various world religions.

One of the themes he constantly emphasized in his books, articles, lectures and interviews was that we are at the dawn of a new age—perhaps, *the* golden age of our planet—in which the old structures and forms will give way to a universal culture and civilization that harmonized the mystical with the scientific when what is profoundest in us animates the whole. Bede Griffiths achieved this integrated awareness in himself, and became a living symbol of the bridge he tried to build between East and West, science and religion, the past and the future. When he was preparing to go to India in 1955, he wrote to a friend: "I'm going out to India to seek the other half of my soul." He discovered this "other half" in the awakening of his intuitive, mystical life, and it is this life within the *Cave of the heart* that was India's gift to him, as it is to us.

I find myself in the Void, but the Void is totally saturated by Love.

Bede Griffiths suffered a serious stroke in January 1990 which initiated an intense interior process for him. A letter he wrote to me during the ensuing months was to reveal yet another dimension of his integration. He observed, "I find myself in the Void, but the Void is totally saturated by Love." His inner experience, thus, united two of the most different faiths, the Buddhist and the Christian. Bede Griffiths' teaching, exemplified by his life, can be summed up in this way: Love is the Ultimate Reality, and is the basis of earthly existence, as it is of the entire cosmos. Now Fr. Bede—Swami Dayananda, Bliss of Compassion—belongs to the ages. May his beautiful example be a seed that germinates and transforms the world, allowing it to reach that fullness of the new civilization that he strove to express in his prophetic vision.

dear keeper of the sky
know that I am
a lover of rainbows!
June Moreau

I have learned to fly
inside of a stone
with stone wings!
June Moreau

for my long journey
through the Universe
a coat is fashioned for me
from a remnant of the sky. . .
June Moreau

Nuns in Adoration

These doves on woolen wings
fly in formation
across the altar;
maneuver in dance
before the Eucharist.

Their prayer is tangible
tracery over
the gothic mullions;
flesh like the flowers,
fresh as the fronds.

Outside the worlds divide
continents tremble;
the stars, the planets
hesitate, oh,
peace here is palpable as bread
pours like a wine.
Herbert A. Kenny

Daughters of India

The methods are endless;
a sand bag or a wet towel
pressed to the face,
double dose of opium
in the milk bottle,
a few pieces of unpolished rice
slipped down the throat.
An early death is cheaper
than a lifetime
of rituals.
If these were boys,
now that would be different,
lucrative.
A son need only wear
a simple loincloth.

There are sometimes cribs
where a mother can leave
her unwanted daughter
but these are usually abandoned
in favor of The God of Death.

Three thousand female fetus'
are aborted each day
in India.
The figures for newborn deaths
are unknown.
A mother can tell you about mercy.

What are a few seconds
of suffering
compared to a lifetime?

Corrine DeWinter

And I will be Waiting

Go into the mountains,
my blessed friend,
And find a simple rock. . .
A rock you can hold in the
palm of your hand.
Touch that rock,
Sense that rock,
And think it me.
Feel its strength,
its possibilities!

Go into the forests of the
cities,
And shout with joy that you
are there!
And I will be waiting. . .
In the eyes of strangers you greet,
In the smiles of children
With no shoes on their feet.
Go into their laughter and
dry their tears.
Go into the unknown, for I
will be there.

Our love is just beginning
every morning, Everywhere.
Judith Lundin Lowe

June Moreau, who has won nation-wide recognition for her haiku, lives in Bennington, MA.

Poet, author, essayist, Herbert A. Kenny is a reglar contributor to FiP.

Over 100 of Corrine Dewinter's poems have appeared nationwide and in Canada and England in publications such as The Pinehurst Jounral, Odyssey, Westwords, Mobius, *and* Plainsongs

Also a widely published poet, Judith Lundin Lowe resides in Florissant, MO.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

JOHN CHUCHMAN

A coincidence leads to a new commitment. Please send the story of your own transforming experience to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542. You need not be a professional writer.

In January of 1992, I came across a reading from scripture—I John 4. 7–16*—which exploded in me. It exploded in me because it seemed to have the answers to all the questions and challenges I was facing and perhaps the world was facing.

It had such a profound impact on me that I began reading it, and eventually praying it, daily. And each time I did so, I gained some new insight into its meaning, its relevance to my life in the now.

Recently I have begun to "feel" compelled to share my insights on the reading and have begun drafting a little brochure on it. I also felt inspired to make a little video on the passage, which I have begun.

> God is love, and anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in them.

In January of 1994, I was attending an evening Communion Service at a local church. The Service is conducted by the laity as there is no full-time priest for the parish. The woman who was ministering the service asked me to do the reading and I agreed.

You can guess my reaction when I looked at the lectionary and saw that it was the reading from I John 4.7-16! My heart was pounding in my chest. I was flushed with excitement.

When it came time for me to do the reading, I stood up before the congregation and ercited the entire passage, of course, without once looking at the book. Needless to say the congregation was astonished and wondered what was going on.

At the conclusion of my "reading," I shared with all what had hap-

John Chuchman lives in Central Lake, MI.

Michelle Boyd

pened and that since I had been saying that reading daily, I knew it by heart. Everyone seemed to gasp.

Truly, "coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."

I now know I must continue in my efforts to share I John 4.7-16 with everyone I can.

+ + + + + + + +

*Here is the text of I John 4.7-16—*Ed.*

> Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God; for God is love. God's love for us was revealed when When God sent God's only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent the Christ to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we too should love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love will be complete in us.
>
> By this we know that we live in God and God in us, because God lets us share the Spirit. And we have seen and testify that God has sent the Christ as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in them.

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN

Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela, our canine sage-in-residence, would love to help. Please write to her in care of FiP, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08540, and she will give you her answer in our next issue.

Dear Angela,

Could you share with us your thoughts on how we might experience more genuine feelings with warmth and good will toward each other this holiday season? Thank you.

Sincerely,
A Harried Holiday Celebrator

Dear Harried,

Many thanks for this question. The holidays can be a time of magic and wonder. They can also be hectic, trying, and even lonely. It's probably not necessary to name the reasons why the holidays might find us feeling pressured or short-tempered. We all know them and experience them to some extent. Over the years, I've had my own runins with the holidays and I've been experiencing more warm-heartedness at holiday time these past few years than I once did. If a soul is not a natural celebrator, the holidays can take some getting used to, and may take some extra work.

I offer you now the Angela workout plan for feeling warm-hearted at holiday time. I have used all the techniques listed here personally, and feel 96% more warm-hearted than I did before I began the workout.

The Angela Plan for Feeling Warmhearted at Holiday Time

1. Create a sacred space and prepare it so it's ready for holiday use. Go to it for quiet and peace during holiday planning as well as rest

and refreshment at the height of celebration. Keep the location of your space a secret.

2. Prepare yourself to go with the flow, take the good with the bad, and plan on compromising a bit. Holiday time for me means bath-time. It also means there's a wonderful-smelling tree right in the middle of the living room whose aroma provides countless hours of satisfying sniffing.

My best buddy does all of her holiday chores, and then after it's all over she takes two days for herself where she curls up in a ball and fluffs up the sides of her blanket—two techniques she's learned from me.

3. Recognize and acknowledge the important place of rituals at holiday time, and create your own.

Rituals give meaning to us. In my house after presents are opened, I am given the ceremonial green ribbon and bow to wear around my neck (the ribbon is always green because my fur is always red). I do not like getting dolled up and I'm not delighted by ribbons and bows. However, my family gets great pleasure from this, and I love feeling their pleasure and being a part of it.

Later in the day I take part in my own ribbon ritual. On my walk, I find a mud puddle or some icy slush and a few bushes to run through so that my ribbons and bows return home chewed, frayed, limp, and looking like something the cat dragged in. Needless to say, this ritual is fraught with meaning for me.

4. Ask your heart how it desires to spend the holiday and what it would like to give and receive. Follow its instructions.

5. Plan a holiday that suits you. If you are basically a meditating monk, plan just a few public engagements and keep things basic and simple. If you are an olympic gold celebrator, go for it.

Small gestures of care and kindness such as a home visit or a lap sit can do wonders.

6. Peace on earth begins with peace on your blanket. A warm heart is a peaceful, happy heart, and the way to a happy heart may be through the kitchen. Set up a special pillow in the kitchen so you may

rest with hope and eagerness. Always enter the kitchen with head held high, and a hopeful heart. The holidays bring an array of tasty treats to the bowl, to the mouth, and onto the floor. Be alert. Be prepared. Expect the unexpected.

7. Relax and let go of your expectations of the holidays. It is not wise to pin all your hopes and dreams for the year on one small period of time.

8. Give some thought to adding the name of one soul a little less fortunate than yourself to your gift list. The holidays are a good time to stretch and reach out to others.

9. Set aside some time and some Cheerios for another soul who may be lonely or less able-bodied than yourself. Spending time with another gives your wallet a rest and your heart some healthy exercise. Small gestures of care and kindness such as a home visit or a lap sit can do wonders. Giving a little undivided attention to someone for the holidays can successfully warm up two chilly hearts.

I have had great personal satisfaction from the use of the lap sit. It is a very useful tool for cajoling my best buddy out of the holiday blues. With this technique, I simply sit on her lap while she rubs my chest. Sharing this time and space together, feeling connected in this way, is our mutual gift to each other.

10. Add your own name to your holiday gift list.

After our shared lap sit, I will often go to the basement, to my blanket, chew my toenails, and lick my itchy places all by myself in glorious, blissful solitude. This is my gift to myself, and this ten-point plan my gift to you. I hope it's been of some help.

Wishing all of you warm hearts for the season that lasts all year.

Faithfully,
Angela

Bring Angela Home for the Holidays!

She makes a great gift: *Ask Angela,* by Angela with Barbara Ackerman, a $9.95 paperback original from Crossroad. To order, call 800.937.5557.

Wounded Healers

ANITA WHEATCROFT

Every talent, experience, strength, or weakness can be used to heal or help others.

Choices are part of the fabric of everyday life. For me, one of the most crucial came when our eldest child entered high school. Expensive education loomed ahead for three children, two of whom would be in college at the same time. As a busy minister's wife, homemaking, volunteer teaching, prayer, Bible study and pastoral responsibilities had filled my life. I loved it all but now new choices had to be made.

Financial necessity forces such choices, and background resources and limits help define realistic alternatives. A teacher before, I turned back to it now. Teaching sight-saving classes had been my specialty for two years before marriage, and I was now drawn to professional work with learning disabled children. These children, with no physical impairment, suffer from handicaps more poignant because they are unseen. Their gifts of imagination and artistic or mechanical skills often go unrecognized in our verbal, writing culture. Several friends had children who had just been so diagnosed. This previously undefined field of education had just been recognized, along with methods to treat it. A friend urged me to take a training class offered in a nearby town and then tutor her child. So I stumbled, or was led, into a new vocation, which turned out to be a challenge and a great blessing.

For me it required specialized remedial training, a summer's apprenticeship in a reading clinic, and much book reading before I was ready. My husband supported me in many ways, as always, both with encouragement and practical help. We converted our guest room into my study. I invested in teaching resources and made contacts for prospective students. When I was ready at last, the children came, one an hour, to my door, from a neurologist, several school psychologists, and desperate, hopeful parents. Working with these children, I soon

Poet, author and lecturer, Anita Wheatcroft resides is Texas.

learned, involves counseling, academic instruction, and therapy. Most of all, it requires patience and listening. No two alike, they bring me as much as I teach them. Most of all, they need help to build or to restore a positive self-image. They are, and they need to know and feel they are, unique, valuable, and loved. Religiously speaking, each of them is a creation of our loving God, whether they know that or not.

Today, encouraged by the liberation movements, women seek fulfilling work and service more consciously than I did. Many innovate, combining home and family with outside jobs, often benefiting both. Many more must choose their work from financial necessity and limited availability, yet they give much of themselves to it and find it satisfying. Everywhere women are bringing their special strengths to the mainstream of society: traditionally feminine values, caring and closeness to earth. This can help neutralize the depersonalizing influences in our culture and transform life.

One truth emerged from my own experience that surprised me, which I'm eager to share: We give first out of our abilities and resources. This I knew and could see around me. Happily married women and men counsel families; those intellectually skilled teach; the

Paul M. Schroch

healthy nurse the sick; musicians and creative artists evoke perceptive imagination in less privileged students; writers and poets help others sing with words. Gifts given by God are thus shared in generosity and love.

Yet, I came to see this picture as incomplete. Life, like a painting, includes shadows, or it is not real or whole. We serve from our gifts, but there is more to it than that. Looking more deeply, I discerned a strange paradox: We also give most to the needs we have ourselves experienced—the weaknesses or handicaps we best understand.

For instance, one couple I know works tirelessly for the retarded, their own Mongoloid child tragically out of reach. Each Saturday afternoon a busy secretary visits nursing homes, her own elderly parents having died lonely and far away. Juvenile delinquents are helped toward rehabilitation by a mother whose own runaway girl is temporarily lost to crime. A grief stricken businessman sets up an endowment fund and works with a half-way house since the drug-related suicide of his teenaged son. A heart-broken widow finds solace in forming fellowships for the bereaved. Look around your own community: Cancer drives staffed by recovered patients; AA's, Al-Anons, Weight Watchers, Adult Children of Alcoholics, Emotional Recovery groups of every kind led by former sufferers. Everywhere, I see persons who use their drawbacks as one of their most valuable assets. They change their past by sharing future hope.

Did this also apply to me, I wondered? When I went back to work outside our home, I began in order to help my family financially. I thought I was helping others out of my strengths. Was there, however, another reason inspiring me to go on now, after many years, with financial crisis past—often exhausted but with enthusiasm and delight undiminished? Why was helping these children's spiritual as well as academic life such a special joy?

One day I found out. My students have disabilities, manifested in part by confusion of handedness or mixed dominance. While visiting my own parents one summer, I discovered a previously unknown fact about myself as a young child. Born completely left-dominant, I was forced by my strict and loving grandparents and my teachers to change handedness in writing and everything else, "to fit into a right-handed world." They forced me to eat meals with my left hand tied behind me and a mirror in front of my plate. Table manners improved, but self-esteem diminished.

Develop your abilities to the full and use them for others.

Yet, out of this came a great blessing. One night when my parents were away, homesick and yearning for them, and unable to meet the expectations of my Victorian grandparents, I was crying in bed with my head stuffed under the pillow. Then I prayed as I'd been taught by our loving housekeeper, Teresa. Not repeating prayers by wrote, I really talked to God, who looked like Jesus on my picture Bible. Immediately the room was filled with light and I was enfolded in peace. That night I discovered a secret dialogue, the language of prayer with a loving God that has grown with the years and is the greatest gift and comfort of my life. Though the changing of handedness was wrong, done out of well-meaning ignorance, "God used it for good." (Genesis 50.20)

Inwardly I had an ever-growing relationship with a loving God. Yet there were problems to overcome. Retraining of handedness shadowed my early experience of school. I also remember struggling with bouts of paralyzing shyness off and on for many years that may have been partly due to low self-esteem. However, it is these very drawbacks, as well as my gifts, that help me now to empathize, to patiently challenge children afflicted with similar but greater handicaps.

One day the following insight came to me: From where does healing come? From wounded healers. Liberation? From those liberated from disadvantage. Courage? From victories over despair. My husband, a potter, has told me that pottery which is mended is strongest in the once-broken place. Compassion for others is response to God for mercies. Grace is given, not for our deserving, but for our need. It is the overflow of gratitude that motivates us.

Compassion, modelled so perfectly by all great spiritual leaders and especially in Christ, has always been the special vocation of women. Of course, many gifted, imaginative men have pioneered, and do so today, on behalf of human betterment. Great reforms have been, and are today, initiated by men in all fields. Women, however, partly because we grew up in a man's world, which is changing, often better understand the underdog, the quiet sufferers. We know by empathy, if not by experience, the plight of the blacks, the browns and the handicapped. We often understand the poor, the very young, and the very

old, especially those in Nursing Homes. This gives many women patience to perform difficult and menial tasks for them.

No man or woman can serve all the causes that appeal. We are called to different vocations. But we can help each other discover our special truth. Better to discover and cultivate that special plot of ground, what Quakers call our "bundle of concern," than try to do everything. Whether trapped in an unfulfilling job or employed in work that expresses our capabilities, we can all pause to reflect on our own needs and gifts, and then make them available to others in compassionate work.

So now I am asked, as you are, by a voice within, "How can I serve in the days or years that remain?" Out of my inner faith the quiet answer comes. "Develop your abilities to the full and use them for others. Remember your weaknesses and give thanks for them as well. They too can be used as powerful resources." I recall Paul's words: "My strength is made perfect in weakness. . .For when I am weak then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12.9-10)

MOVING?

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To Walk Like an Angel

MARIE FATTORE

The tree has been up for two weeks now, the gifts carefully wrapped, and the house decorated for the Yule-tide season, yet I must admit that there have been very loose ends in my life, questions unanswered, dreams not yet achieved. As Christmas was approaching I wanted to screech it to a halt and say, "Wait! No—not now! I'm not yet ready for Christmas!"

Perhaps I've been too influenced by the media to achieve that moment of perfection, but I've filled my days with every Christmas event imaginable. I've seen the "Nutcracker," attended the "Messiah" concert, given a Christmas tea, gone to three office Christmas parties, and yet there was still an unmistakable void. So when my girlfriend asked me to go to New York City recently to meet her parents who were showing a tapestry exhibit of Quaker history on loan from England, and suggested later that we see "the lights," I agreed, knowing full well that this, too, would never give me the Christmas "high" I was so desperately seeking.

As we entered the Lutheran Church in the middle of the city, I heard a pastor preaching about the meaning of Christmas. She spoke about how we often are not ready for Christmas in our hearts because we're looking for "the moment of perfection" to greet the Christ child. She told of how the media portrays this myth of Christmas and how most of us never measure up.

I walked upstairs to the coffee hour awaiting us and thought perhaps I had finally heard the true meaning of Christmas. As I wandered over to the tapestry display, I noticed a balding, blue-eyed man in a turtleneck that matched his eyes, probably in his late sixties, sitting alone at a table nearby. He told me he was homeless and looked forward to Sunday coffee hours for a bite to eat, and some hot coffee. Trying not to be rude, I was nevertheless dismissing him when I heard him speak louder. "Excuse me, Miss," he said. "Has anyone ever told you, you walk like an angel?

"Pardon me" I said, startled by the question.

A freelance writer, Marie Fattore also does social work in New Haven, CT.

"Well, you should walk like an angel," he replied, a soft smile appearing on his face, "because it's Christmas!"

I began thinking about angels. It was an angel that announced to Mary that she would bear the Son of God, an angel who proclaimed the birth of Christ, and angels who adored the "newborn Savior." Angels knew how to celebrate the first Christmas. Was this man telling me that buried deep within my heart, perhaps, was the true spirit of Christmas? I don't believe it was a coincidence that I met this homeless man who may not have had family or friends, and probably no idea if he'd even eat on Christmas. Yet this lonely individual knew why we celebrate Christmas every December 25th.

And so, as we celebrate the holy season this year, my wish for you is that you, too, "walk like an angel—because it's Christmas!"

Was this man telling me that buried deep within my heart, perhaps, was the true spirit of Christmas?

WHEREVER YOU GO THERE YOU ARE: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life *by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Hyperion/New York, 1994, 277 pages, hardcover, $19.95.*

Warmth, compassion and wisdom greet you on every page of this deceptively simple but very profound book on mindfulness meditation. Jon Kabat-Zinn is the founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine. His clinic was featured in the PBS series *Healing and the Mind* with Bill Moyers.

The book explores mindfulness both in formal practice and in our efforts to bring it into all aspects of our daily lives. The focus is on looking deeply into the present moment, without judgment or attachments, in a spirit of generosity, kindness toward ourself, and openness toward what might be possible. Specific exercises and suggestions for strengthening your practice of mindfulness are included at the end of many of the chapters. Clearly written, without hype or jargon, this is an excellent book if you are interested in strengthening and sharing the fullness of your being, your best self, your enthusiasm, your vitality, your spirit, your openness and, above all, your presence. *PW*

THE EMPTY CHAIR: Timeless Wisdom from a Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Adapted by Moshe Mykoff and the Breslov Research Institute, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 1994, 116 pages, $9.95.

As beautiful in design as it is interesting in content, this little book will make an ideal gift for men and women committed to the life of the spirit. Rebbe Nachman, who was born in 1772 in Ukraine, was the great-grandson of the founder of the Jewish Hasidic movement. While his thought reaches into the depths and heights of Kabbalah mysticism, it is remarkably practical and relevant. A typical aphorism says, "Everything in the world—whatever is and whatever happens—is a test, designed to give you freedom of choice."

It is no coincidence that Rebbe Nachman's thought emerged at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and is re-emerging in the breakdown of the Industrial era. His calming and uplifting message addresses times of chaos, offering as an alternative to confusion and purposelessness a way to return to the Living God. More books about Rebbe Nachman are available at Jewish Lights Publishing (Tel: 802. 457. 4000). *MFG*

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